

## Parents Question Safety of Bluefish River Bridge Tradition

By KELLY CLARK

It's been a tradition for as long as most Duxbury residents can remember, but lately, jumping off the Bluefish River Bridge has turned from tame to treacherous.

Given the recent car accidents involving two children jumping off the bridge, town officials and residents are taking a closer look at public safety. The first accident occurred on June 21 when a 14-year-old boy was struck by a car on Washington Street. Even though the teen was not seriously injured, the accident occurred when he tried to dart across the street as the car was approaching.

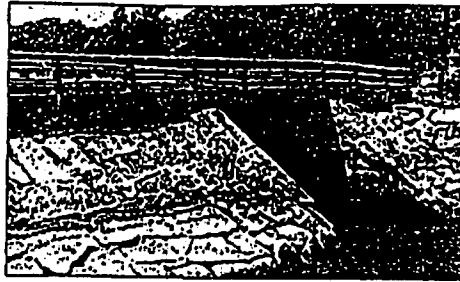
The next child involved in an accident by the bridge was not from Duxbury, but Plymouth. Chief Mark DeLuca of the Duxbury Police Department said the boy darted across the street to see one of his friends swim under the bridge and ran into the side of a passing car.

"I know it's been a favorite spot in Duxbury for years so it's a difficult thing," DeLuca said. He said that the increased population, combined with many vehicles using Washington Street to access the beach, has made this popular spot very dangerous.

For Board of Selectmen Chairwoman Detsy Sullivan, the question of whether to keep a tradition alive or to ban jumping to ensure public safety is a tough one. "I have some mixed personal feelings because it is part of the nostalgic youth that we try to give them [children] in this town. This is one of those growing up in Duxbury things, but kids are unsupervised and putting themselves in harm's way," she said.

Sullivan said she has been discussing the issue with Town Manager Richard MacDonald and DeLuca and while she said the simplest solution would be to post that jumping is not allowed, that has not been the decision yet.

"The selectmen are struggling with what is our responsibility?"



When the tide is high on hot days, the Bluefish River Bridge attracts herds of kids from Duxbury and surrounding towns to jump into the Bluefish River. Lately, the safety of this tradition is being questioned.

What is the kids' responsibility or the parents'?" Sullivan said. "We do have the ability to make it illegal and a lot of people think that's the answer."

When the weather is hot and the tide is high, Sullivan said there are approximately 20 to 30 kids waiting by the bridge and running back and forth to each side of Washington Street. "I don't remember it being that congested years ago," she said. "Now it seems like there's a herd of kids down there."

Sullivan said she is considering options to keep kids safe and since discussions are ongoing, she said she welcomes any reasonable suggestions. Options like blocking off the road or installing speed bumps are not feasible, Sullivan said, since Washington Street is a public road.

"If we as a town can protect birds on the beach we can get an officer there to protect kids," Sullivan said. "It was like they were at a swimming hole and they forgot it was a street." Increased police coverage during high tides is one of the solutions Sullivan is looking into.

Kids have been jumping off the bridge for all 11 years that MacDonald has been in Duxbury and his concern is public safety. "We have an obligation to keep kids safe," he said. "We have to take a good hard look at this and make a decision."

Fire Chief Kevin Nurd also

understands the dangers associated with the Bluefish River Bridge. He said he would like to work with the police department and take the issue to the Highway Safety Advisory Committee in order to provide both education and enforcement.

"I'd hate to see someone get hurt," Nurd said. "But aside from restricting travel to one car at a time or building a sidewalk, the town doesn't want to do that."

Nurd spoke of a similar bridge in Cohasset, the Border Street Bridge, which has experienced similar problems with public safety. According to Cohasset police, problems at the bridge have been going on for sometime and now it is enforced by patrols. When police see children jumping off the bridge, they clear them off.

Betsy Hunter of Herring Weir Road said she and her kids have jumped off the Bluefish River Bridge and she thinks it is a fun thing to do, as long as it's done responsibly. "It's what people think is a rite of passage but I'm tired of people thinking it's my right," she said.

"The police turned a blind eye for as long as they could and now they're taking control," Hunter said.

One resident who is very concerned with kids jumping off the bridge is Diana Ikeda of Crooked Lane. In her letter to the editor in the July 26 edition of the *Clipper*, she wrote that while she understands the "sacred tradition," she has "always thought jumping off the bridge was an extremely dangerous activity and wondered if it is illegal."

She shared a personal story about her cousin who became a quadriplegic at age 16 after jumping off a bridge into shallow water. "...he confessed to me that there wasn't a day in his life that he didn't regret that dive," Ikeda wrote.

Ikeda suggested the town allocate funds to build an outdoor pool so kids can enjoy swimming in a supervised environment. "But unequivocally I argue that the safety of our children is and should be the priority," she wrote.